

In partnership with Missions Publiques
and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation



Engaging Citizens for Inclusive Futures

Rebuilding Social Cohesion and Trust through Citizen Dialogues

INSIGHT REPORT
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Executive summary

The economic and social disruption created by the COVID-19 pandemic is severe. Loss of lives and livelihoods, poverty and inequality are rising in every country on Earth. Social movements such as Black Lives Matter have brought attention to systemic injustices across our societies. The compounding effects of different crises present a serious threat to social cohesion and global cooperation, potentially setting off a vicious cycle of economic despair and social unrest.¹

While knowing the aggregated effects of COVID-19 on the world helps us see the big picture for the post-pandemic recovery, understanding the individual experiences and perceptions of citizens will help chart a path forward towards a just recovery that puts those most affected by the crisis at the centre of these efforts. In this report, we share the results of deliberative citizen dialogues, unearthing collective intelligence on citizen priorities during the pandemic and beyond. The dialogues were

conducted with 120-plus participants in five different contexts in December 2020: they encompassed European countries (France and Germany), India, West Africa, an international network of youth students and children, giving a glimpse of the global scale of the effects. The dialogues were executed with the support of six partnering organisations: Civis, Confkids, Isha Foundation, Missions Publiques, United World Colleges (UWC) and the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI). To ensure representative and evidence-based recommendations, the dialogue findings presented in this report have been supplemented by further supporting materials and insights, priorities and solutions proposed by global civil society.

The findings highlight the effects of COVID-19 on the participants and their priorities for the post-pandemic recovery, as well as the importance of social cohesion and trust. The report concludes with a proposal to spur collective action for a transformational recovery.

COVID-19 opens the doors to change

While, overall, participants felt that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on their lives, there is optimism that the crisis will pave the way for positive effects in the years to come. There is a strong sentiment for change after the COVID-19 outbreak, both personally and for society.

The top positive impacts identified include increased solidarity in society, an infrastructure boost in developing nations and beneficial effects on the environment. A lack of clarity and transparency in decision-making, amplification of social inequalities and insecurity in livelihoods, and a decrease in global collaboration were emphasized as the biggest negative effects of the pandemic.

Strengthening social cohesion

The resilience of a society is dependent on high levels of social cohesion. In a time when economic and social issues are worsening and the vulnerability of individuals is increasing, an approach to the future needs to be cohesive rather than divisive.

Equality was deemed the central element to advancing social cohesion. Fairness in vaccine distribution stood out as a priority to drive equity in a post-COVID-19 world. Participants felt that trust in others was being eroded during the pandemic. A sense of declining trust in government was also

observed. At the same time a stronger sense of social cohesion emerged that strengthened trust; this was exemplified by many solidarity initiatives and the great deal of mutual aid that was established.

Collective action and collectivism, dialogue, participation, diversity and social awareness and education on the root causes of inequality were all seen as central to encouraging social cohesion. Additionally, the role of religion and its influence in building social cohesion should not be underestimated.

Important actions for communities, policy-makers and companies

Five main recommendations for decision-makers were consolidated across the different deliberative dialogues. In the years to come, leaders should focus on improving public services, take decisions that prioritize environmental needs, build economic systems that are strong and resilient and that

consider the well-being of humanity (rather than just GDP). Additionally, they should establish more horizontal governance and mechanisms to consider citizen needs and visions, and ensure respect for human rights in all countries of the world.

The way forward: unlocking the potential of deliberative processes and multistakeholder cooperation

There is hope for stakeholders to move jointly out of this crisis and build fairer, more just and resilient economies and society. The COVID-19 pandemic has been described by many as an inflection point, with the challenges in front of us requiring immediate collective action. As this report demonstrates, moving forward together is possible. It will require coordinated multistakeholder action, with citizen and community needs and perspectives at the centre, allowing us to mitigate the worst future outcomes and sustaining our resilience as a global collective. Reimagined and adapted mechanisms for collaboration are imperative to make this a reality. They should reflect, prioritize and recognize the importance of:

1. **Co-determining and co-creating solutions for the present and future.** Deliberative processes can play a pivotal role in shaping responses fit for the future. Not just listening to, but actively including, citizens, communities and civil society can help unearth early warning signs and help us understand where, as societies, we are vulnerable, and how best to respond to that vulnerability. Additionally, unlocking the public imagination – giving agency and voice to and supporting a larger number of individuals in society – will lead to better decisions and governance outcomes, and help counteract polarization and social unrest. Based on that evidence, governments and institutions are increasingly turning to the public for help in decision-making. The Conference on the Future of Europe, for example, will kick off the European Union’s largest deliberative democracy process.²

2. **Making social cohesion a priority.** New Zealand has been praised for the way it has managed the pandemic and was recently ranked as the country with the best COVID-19 response, in part due to its focus on social cohesion in its response.³ During the acute phase of the pandemic in April 2020, levels of social cohesion in the country were high: 87% of citizens approved of the way the government was responding to the pandemic, compared to an average of 50% for those in G7 countries who were asked the same question.⁴ As tensions between economic and social interests persist, it will be particularly important to focus on transparent and responsive leadership, encouraging trust and belonging and recognizing and responding to individual experiences and needs – all necessary ingredients for a cohesive society.
3. **Centring multistakeholder partnerships on community needs.** A report by Philanthropy U, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and GSVlabs shows the imperative to work collaboratively and creatively, with new models of impact, in order to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In a multistakeholder context, partnerships must be “driven by a collaboration between the people most affected and those most accountable for progress”.⁵ This will set us on a course to act quickly and with purpose within an unsettled global landscape.

Looking ahead: The Davos Lab

The World Economic Forum’s [Global Shapers Community](#) is launching **The Davos Lab**, a grassroots and youth-driven recovery plan in response to the COVID-induced recession and other converging crises. The Davos Lab: Building Our Future is a Global Shapers Community initiative that aims to inspire, support and connect young people to shape the unprecedented and on-the-ground global response needed to address the coronavirus pandemic and the world’s other converging crises. Aggregating the insights, ideas and concerns of citizens and stakeholders in more than 150 countries worldwide, The Davos Lab will culminate in a youth-driven recovery plan featuring tangible actions to create a better future.

This recovery plan (crowdsourced through a 10-week campaign of global dialogues and surveys held around the world) will be launched at the World Economic Forum’s Special Annual Meeting 2021 and will focus on 10 major recovery efforts needed to reset economic, social and environmental systems. It will also outline a new vision for youth activism and collective action for the current decade and beyond, focusing on self-enquiry, systems leadership, intergenerational allyship and more.

Learn more about The Davos Lab [here](#).

To participate, register [your dialogue](#) today.

Introduction

Collective intelligence and deliberative processes that enhance civic participation have the ability to transform how we approach our common future, leading to better decisions and outcomes for all.

There are moments of disruption that test our resilience as a society and require deep reflection on how we move forward as a collective. The COVID-19 crisis is one such moment. The pandemic and the associated measures taken to fight the spread of the virus have had serious consequences for people across every country, city, village and community.

The effects of the virus haven't been felt equally, worsening existing systemic inequalities, putting those in the most vulnerable situations at

greater risk, increasing mistrust in institutions and contributing to a growing sense of injustice over access to health services, decent jobs and livelihoods, climate change, and risks of conflicts that could undermine development, peace and social cohesion.

As a recent report by Oxfam International shows, the world could face the biggest rise in inequality since records began, and it may take more than a decade for billions of the world's poorest people to recover from the economic hit of the pandemic.⁶

FIGURE 1 The inequality virus



Source: <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621149/bp-the-inequality-virus-250121-en.pdf> p.8



The pandemic has also put trust to the test, “adding persistent personal and societal fears”. This lack of trust is harming the joint capacity of all stakeholders to cooperate in managing the many challenges facing the world.⁷

Insights into how this crisis is affecting individuals, as well as participatory discussions about our common future, are central to building back trust, a global sense of belonging, community and unity – and to inspire the transformational recovery the world so desperately needs.

Collective intelligence, the “enhanced capacity that is created when people work together” and deliberative processes that enhance civic participation have the ability to transform how we approach this common future – leading to better decisions and outcomes for all. To achieve this requires systemic change in how we collaborate, listen to and partner with each other.

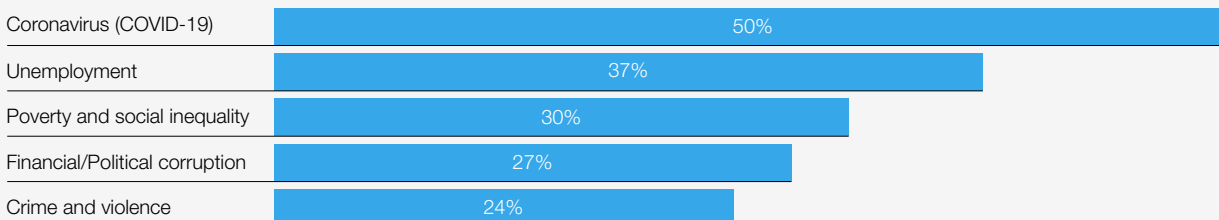
This report offers a glimpse into citizen and community priorities within conversations about the COVID-19 crisis and recovery. Deliberative dialogues, held in five different global contexts in December 2020, answered a common question: what decisions do we need to take now so that future generations will be proud of us? The perspectives are complemented by community insights, priorities and solutions proposed by global civil society.

The message to global leaders is this: human beings the world over share the same vision for the future, one that is more equal, just and that puts people and the planet first. Citizens and communities have perspectives, ideas and solutions that should be heard. The way in which we carry out the transformation to a more inclusive future is just as important as its result. It requires us to be more conscious of our interconnectedness, appreciate our diversity and listen to each other.

FIGURE 2 What worries the world? Ipsos survey, February 2021

Coronavirus remains the top concern since April 2020. The global average from our 27-country survey shows that one in two consider COVID-19 to be one of the most worrying issues facing their country today. Meanwhile, almost two-thirds (64%) say things in their country are on the “wrong track”.

Which three of the following topics do you find the most worrying in your country?



Change vs. last month



Generally speaking, would you say things in this country are heading in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track?

% change vs. last month



Base: Representative sample of 19,520 adults aged 16-74 in 27 participating countries, 18 January 2021–5 February 2021

Source: <https://www.ipsos.com/en-nl/what-worries-world-november-2020>

1

Community engagement and participation: a deliberative method to engage citizens

Mini-publics enable direct engagement and listening to citizens, offering a glimpse into global priorities.



“ Participatory and deliberative tools are also a mechanism to complement existing democratic processes. In the context of multistakeholder partnerships, they present an important additional pillar to the voice of institutionalized civil society.

There are many ways to engage citizens and communities in decision-making processes. Different forms and methods of collaborative, deliberative and participatory decision-making have been evolving for centuries. These range from citizens’ assemblies and panels to less traditional participatory techniques such as crowdsourcing, gamification and experiential futures.⁸ All have the same goal: to enable better and more informed decisions through sourced ideas and co-created solutions.⁹

The public, private and third sectors are increasingly using participatory methods to involve citizens and communities directly in solving some of the world’s most pressing global challenges. Evidence shows that these approaches:

1. Allow us to benefit from, and draw on, local expertise and evidence, in recognition of the influence and knowledge that communities hold¹⁰
2. Help address a sense of being left out and disenfranchised, by giving agency, voice and supporting a larger number of individuals in society

3. Support rebuilding trust and lead to more effective and legitimate decision-making
4. Increase the ability to socialize difficult decisions – that is, ensure a diversity of voices is heard in making the decisions
5. Help counteract polarization and disinformation¹¹

Participatory and deliberative tools are also a mechanism to complement existing democratic processes. In the context of multistakeholder partnerships, they present an important additional pillar to the voice of institutionalized civil society.

In a time of complex change, when institutions are struggling to deliver solutions to concurrent crises, decision-making power should be granted to citizen and community voices, in recognition of their expertise, and be used to make better decisions.

1.1 Citizen dialogues on a post-COVID-19 world

This project aimed to raise citizen voices within conversations about the COVID-19 crisis and recovery. The approach followed was that of engaging and listening directly to citizens based on the methodology of mini-publics, established in the social and political sciences, and developed and studied for more than 30 years.¹² Local citizen dialogues gathering together between 12 and 24 ordinary citizens for half a day were organized, guided by the rules of the “mini-publics”.

As such, conversations are carried out as deliberations following a common protocol (as opposed to a focus group, survey or an in-depth interview). Insights are gathered directly from these discussions. Additionally, an online questionnaire is sent to the participants at the end of each dialogue to collect quantitative data, including demographic data, questions about the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and what it has meant for participants’ life, society and social cohesion, and the impact of the dialogue on participants.

The participants are not statistically representative of the population of their country, but are

representative of a diversity of this population. This diversity is ensured globally and locally. Citizens participating in these mini-publics are “ordinary citizens” – they are not experts, nor do they represent the interests of a specific stakeholder group. Although mini-publics normally take place through face-to-face interactions, the COVID-19 pandemic brought most of them. The dialogues were carried out in December 2020 with the support of partnering organizations.¹³

By conducting this experimental dialogue with 120-plus participants in five different contexts – European countries (France and Germany), India, West Africa, an international network of youth students and with children – the results give a glimpse of the global scale of effects. To ensure representative and evidence-based recommendations, the dialogue findings presented in this report have been completed by further supporting materials. The quotes included in this report illustrate the perspectives of individual participants and do not necessarily represent the views of the dialogue organisers.

1.2 Context of the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2020

With every country affected to a different degree by the pandemic, resulting in differing public health measures and restrictions being implemented across

the world, it is important to take into account the national context within participants’ countries at the time when the citizen dialogues were conducted.

In India in December, for example, while cases were rising, the federal government imposed less severe restrictions such as limiting religious, sporting, social and other gatherings to 200 people, while advising vulnerable groups such as those above 65 years of age or with comorbidities to stay at home. Some states, however, had imposed more severe measures, including curfews and lockdowns. Additionally, the momentum of the Indian farmers' protests against farm acts passed by the parliament of India was continuing to grow across the country.

In France, on the other hand, a nationwide lockdown was in place until 15 December, after which it was replaced by a less severe curfew. A brief exception allowing small groups to gather for Christmas celebrations had also been announced. Protests were also taking place in Paris and other parts of the country against police violence and a new security bill that some thought would restrict civil liberties.

In Germany, cases were rising in December, with daily death rates the highest they had been

throughout the pandemic. A strict countrywide lockdown was in place, with only essential businesses remaining open, and only a minor easing of restrictions over Christmas.

Encompassing many different countries, West Africa had significant variations in infection rates and restrictions throughout December. Yet while overall cases were beginning to climb again, many countries were avoiding instituting the lockdowns that had been in place earlier in the year. News was also breaking that there would be a significant delay in vaccine availability for African countries.

Similarly, with a network of schools across numerous countries, participants from United World Colleges (UWC) were experiencing varying degrees of impact from the pandemic and associated restrictions on their lives and education. However, the majority of students had experienced full or partial physical school closures, with education moving online, but had returned to in-person learning later in the year.



1.3 The impact of COVID-19

On a global scale, the COVID-19 crisis has had a major impact on people and the planet. The World Bank estimates that COVID-19 has pushed between 88 million and 115 million additional people into extreme poverty, while at least 1.5 billion children and youths were out of school at the peak of the pandemic.¹⁴ On the other hand, global CO₂ emissions are expected to have dropped by 7% in 2020 due to reduced industrial operations and air transport.¹⁵

While knowing the aggregated effects of COVID-19 on the world helps us see the big picture for

the post-pandemic recovery, understanding the individual experiences and perceptions of citizens will help chart a path forward towards a just recovery that puts those most affected by the crisis at the centre of these efforts.

Overall, while participants felt that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on their lives, there is optimism that the crisis will pave the way for positive impacts in the years to come. There is a strong sentiment for change after the COVID-19 outbreak, both personally and for society as a whole.

1. Top negative impacts of the pandemic identified by participants

Lack of ability of national institutions to respond to the crisis, and lack of clarity and transparency in decision-making

Participants in France and India thought that national health and education systems were ill-equipped to deal with the magnitude of the pandemic, revealing issues related to affordable health insurance, the

availability of trained medical staff and equipment, and digital infrastructure for online education, especially in rural areas. This, paired with muddled communications in terms of relief efforts shared by decision-makers, has increased mistrust in governmental institutions.

In their study of 13,500 children and 31,500 caregivers from 46 countries, Save the Children found that more than 8 in 10 children reported learning little or nothing at all due to their inability to attend school, while 89% of households said their access to healthcare, medicine or medical supplies had been affected.¹⁶

Amplification of social inequalities

Participants across the world, especially young people, said that those hit hardest by the pandemic and associated problems were already-vulnerable populations, including isolated people and the unemployed. This is in line with growing evidence from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other authorities that racial, ethnic and other minority groups have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis.¹⁷

They also felt that the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, increasing poverty, starvation, violence against women and children, and lack of social protections for migrant workers – effects that have been reported on a global level by the likes of UN Women, the World Food Programme and the European Commission.^{18,19,20} Participants felt that the people and institutions in power were not doing enough to address these issues.

Women Deliver also found a disproportionate impact on female respondents vs. male respondents in 13 of the 17 countries surveyed, with female respondents reporting that they experienced more emotional stress or mental health issues (37% of female respondents on average, compared to 27% of male respondents).²¹

Decrease in global collaboration

Participants thought the crisis highlighted the vulnerabilities and shortcomings of capitalism and globalization. As examples, they raised the lack of coordination between countries in managing effective

responses to the pandemic (and indeed heightened competition, such as through the race to find a vaccine), the lack of power and effectiveness of international organizations, and the alarming increase in state protectionism (e.g. through “buy domestic” campaigns and policies).

Mercy Corps found that the pandemic has led to deteriorating relationships between local groups in 22 countries where they work, whereas only four countries saw an improvement in social cohesion.²² They also witnessed deteriorating relations between states and society as well as a proliferation of misinformation in many of the countries where they work.

Loss of livelihoods and worsened well-being

Across all dialogues participants highlighted the mass loss of jobs or income as a result of the pandemic, especially daily waged workers, small business owners who had to shut down and farmers who could not get their produce to markets. This is in line with the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s findings that the equivalent of 255 million full-time jobs were lost during 2020.²³

Degrading mental health was raised by numerous participants, spurred by a lack of social contacts, inability to go outside, loss of livelihood and a general sense of fear from the pandemic and misinformation. Numerous health institutes have found an overall increase in various mental health difficulties during the pandemic, with Women Deliver surveying close to 17,000 men and women across 17 different countries to hear their perceptions of the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, among other things.^{24,25} They found that an average of 52% of respondents' mental and physical health were affected by COVID-19, with

emotional stress or mental health issues being the most prevalent. Similarly, Save the Children found that 8 in 10 children experienced more negative feelings during the pandemic, with a shocking one-third of households reporting violence in the home, more frequently when schools were closed.

Growing spread of disinformation

Concerns about greater amounts of disinformation in the news and on social media were raised by numerous participants. Conspiracy theories and rumours about the pandemic posted on social media and promoted by politicians have created a lot of distrust among citizens. Participants stressed the need for government and state institutions to be transparent and truthful in their communications to maintain and increase trust among citizens, while also acknowledging the agency and participation of citizens in sharing disinformation.

The spread of disinformation worldwide during the pandemic – labelled an “infodemic” – has been widely reported over the past year, including by journalists in 125 countries.²⁶

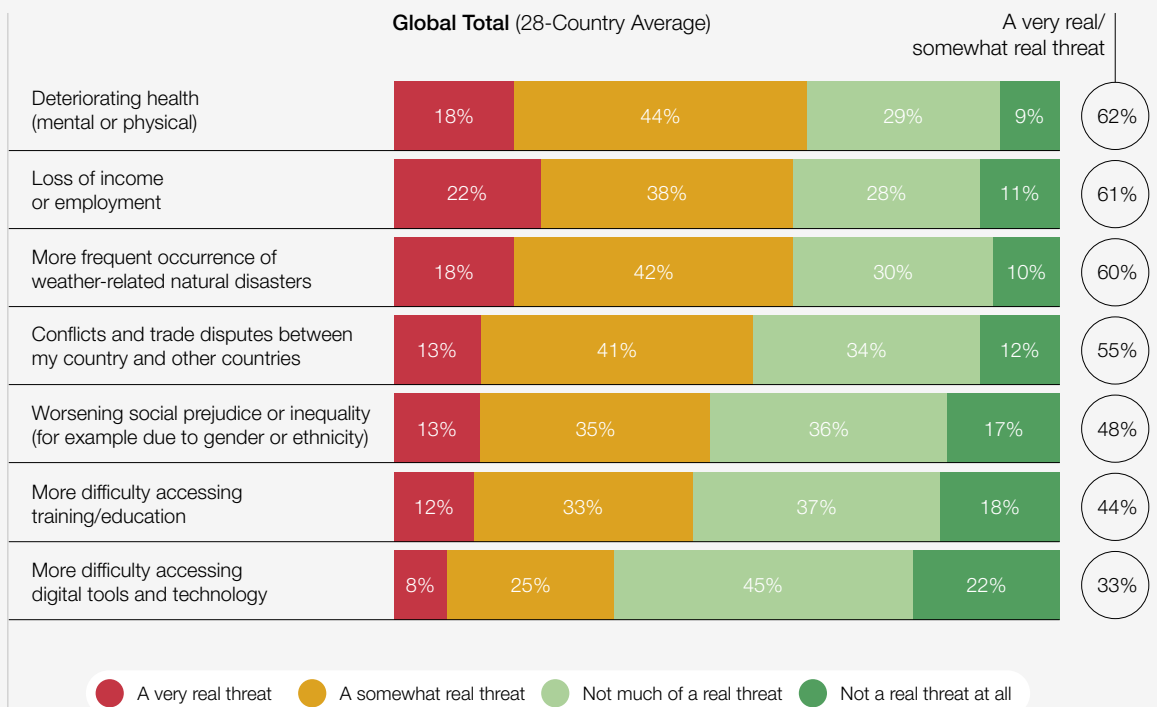
A recent online survey of 23,004 adults aged 16–74 in 28 countries carried out for the World Economic Forum by Ipsos measured the level of concern on seven possible developments. Deteriorating health, loss of income or employment, and more frequent weather-related natural disasters are each perceived as a real threat by three out of five adults around the world. In contrast, only one in three worry about facing more difficulty accessing digital tools and technology in 2021, and only about two in five are concerned about increased difficulty in accessing training or education.²⁷

FIGURE 3 Level of individuals' personal concern over seven possible developments

Q. How real do you feel the threat is of you and your family having to face any of the following in the next 12 months?

Deteriorating health, loss of income or employment and more frequent weather-related natural disasters are each perceived as a real threat by three out of five adults across the world.

In contrast only one-third worry about facing more difficulty accessing digital tools and technology in 2021, and only about two in five about more difficulty accessing training or education.



Base: 23,004 online adults aged 16-74 across 28 countries

Source: <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-01/personal-concern-and-expectations-about-7-key-issues-in-2021.pdf>

2. Top positive impacts identified by participants

Increased solidarity in society

Participants highlighted how people came together to help those in need of support during the pandemic with food, finances, personal protective equipment (PPE) etc. This also included an overall sense of solidarity in protecting others (e.g. by wearing masks)

and happened both on a small community scale, and in larger regional and global initiatives. The pandemic also shed light on existing social and economic inequalities, leading to greater respect for, and solidarity with, minority communities (e.g. Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+ rights).



It's a chance to start a fresh bottom-up approach and cater to minorities.

Participant in India

Effects on the environment

The positive effects of the climate movement were raised by many participants, as they found that the pandemic and associated lockdowns reduced the global carbon footprint and allowed the planet to “rest”. Participants also said the pandemic allowed them to reflect on their consumption patterns and lifestyles, and to be more ecologically and

health-focused. While global CO2 emissions are expected to have dropped by 7% in 2020, the World Meteorological Organization's United in Science 2020 report found that emissions began rising again once people returned to work in June, and greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere have continued to rise.²⁸



In terms of climate activism, it has made it clear we can achieve quick results by working together.

Youth participant

Infrastructure boost in developing nations

Participants witnessed a boost in healthcare infrastructure and investment, such as telemedicine and attention paid to the salaries of front-line workers, in response to COVID-19, which they believe will benefit society long after the pandemic.

Participants also thought the pandemic presents an opportunity for an architectural revolution, where urban planning can emphasize pedestrianized and green spaces, as well as social inclusion such as gender-neutral bathrooms.



The crisis highlighted crucially important roles (e.g. nurses, supermarket workers, cleaners etc.) that have been ignored in the past and don't get paid well enough. Society clapped for them – giving them salaries and recognition they deserve would be a good start.

Youth participant

New economic and educational opportunities

Participants brought up the fact that the overall development of the virtual economy was a positive change, and they saw an increase in innovation that has helped some businesses to remain afloat. Similarly, participants found they had greater

opportunities to learn and use digital tools for educational and professional purposes, but also to discover new skills at home, including learning traditional home remedies for minor diseases to avoid going to hospital.

2

The need to rebuild confidence in the future and to further social cohesion

As tensions between economic and social interests persist, it will be particularly important to focus on transparent and responsive leadership, encouraging trust and belonging, and recognizing and responding to individual experiences and needs.





We are facing a human crisis unlike any we have experienced, and our social fabric and cohesion is under stress.

UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed²⁹

A cohesive society is defined as one where its members feel, “the presence of high levels of trust, a sense of belonging, a willingness to participate and help others”, and where strong policies are in place “that ensure social and economic inclusion”.³⁰ The resilience of a society is dependent on high levels of social cohesion. In a time where economic and social issues are worsening and the vulnerability of individuals is increasing, an approach to the future needs to be cohesive rather than divisive. Prevailing and prospering in

the future will require a readiness to cooperate, an acknowledgment of the strength of our diversity and the presence of high levels of trust. Social cohesion and justice must therefore be a policy priority as we build back from the pandemic.³¹

In answer to the question of how we can enhance a sense of belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition and legitimacy in society, participants identified several priorities for world leaders.

2.1 Inclusion, participation and shared values

Collective action and collectivism

Adopting an altruistic lens was highlighted by participants as an important element in encouraging social cohesion – examining our own worth through the lens of the value we add to others. Collective action and collectivism were seen as necessary elements to reduce cynicism and advance social cohesion.

Culture

Policy frameworks aiming to advance social cohesion exist, but participants felt that culture had not caught up. Social awareness and education about the root causes of inequality must be raised. Additionally, countries should implement policies that tackle feelings of alienation and discrimination and take legal action against any type of unequal treatment.

Dialogue and participation

According to a group in the French dialogue, strengthening the sense of belonging and legitimacy in society requires the generalization of dialogue. Whether within the home, workplace, national or international institutions, the participation and consideration of others’ point of view and of all members of society are necessary.

To increase citizens’ confidence in their institutions, governments and politics in general, French participants stressed the importance of restoring citizens’ active role in politics by involving them in public decision-making.



At the (French) Citizen’s Climate Convention, the participants were selected by drawing lots. This allowed [including] in the 150 citizens, people who were not necessarily politicized, who did not vote. The fact that citizens participate in this type of approach helps to restore confidence.

Participant in France

Diversity

The need for more diverse representation was underscored. It is important for people to be aware of different elements of identity (e.g. sexuality, gender, race, disability) and to give young people the chance to speak to those in traditional positions of authority who have experience of those identities.

Education

There is a need for people to change their perceptions about how to participate in wider society on an equal footing. A more inclusive and progressive education could help young people challenge the status quo at a societal level and challenge their parents’/guardians’ points of view. Participants

suggested that children should be taught to create an environment free of discrimination, with humility, acceptance and respect towards each other.

Equality

Participants deemed equality as the central element to advancing social cohesion today.

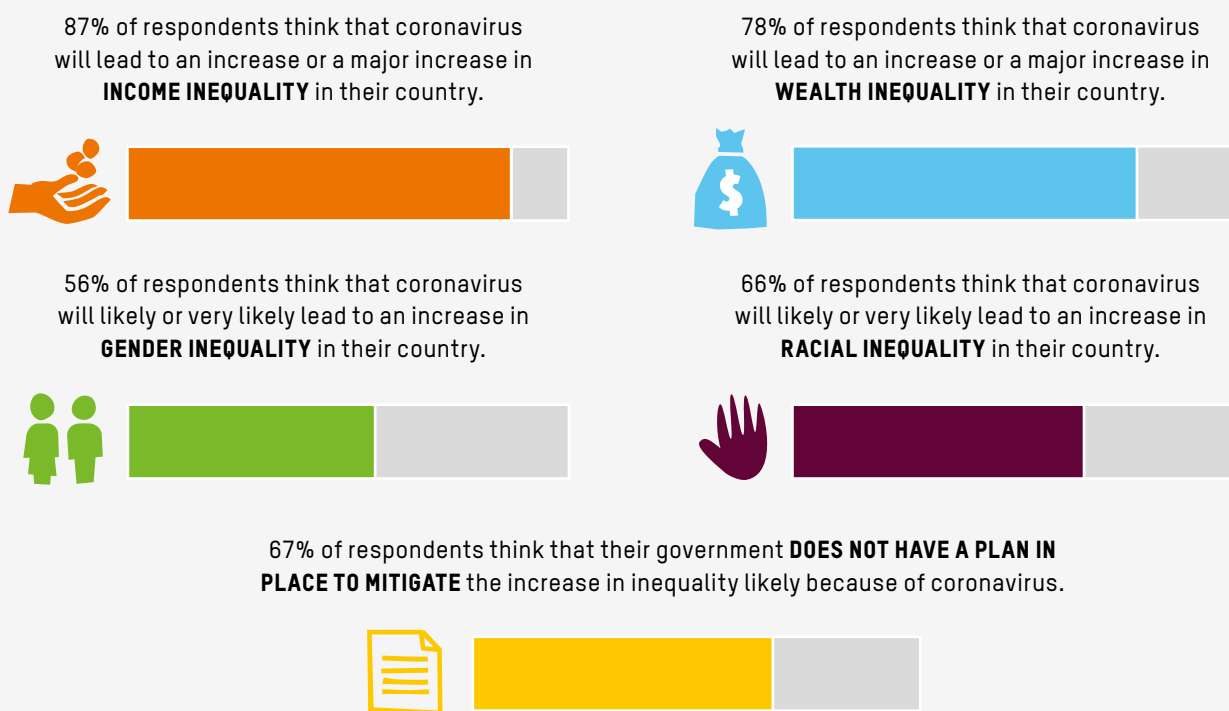
One first step identified to ensure equality post-COVID-19 is a vaccine distribution strategy that is fair and needs-based. A cohesive and well-reasoned global plan should be created to realize this. Participants also highlighted that progressive taxes should be broadly implemented to solve inequality.

#PeoplesVaccine: New statistics released by the People’s Vaccine Alliance show that 9 out of 10 people in poor countries are set to miss out on the COVID-19 vaccine next year: “Rich countries have enough doses to vaccinate everyone nearly three times over, whilst poor countries don’t have enough to even reach health workers and people at risk.”³²

Regarding equity and social cohesion, young people who participated in a conversation organized by [Confkids](#) raised the importance of respecting gender equality, in particular, equality in employment (remuneration, opening up positions to all candidates regardless of gender), the right to vote and to education, but also the visibility of women in society

(e.g. through sport). Another injustice raised by young people, highlighted by the COVID-19 crisis, was the lack of value placed on essential jobs and the effects of massive layoffs made by some companies during the crisis. They also raised the issue of migration and the importance of helping migrants.

FIGURE 4 **Main findings from Oxfam’s survey of economists on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on inequality**



Source: oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621149/bp-the-inequality-virus-250121-en.pdf p.9

The COVID-19 virus has exposed, fed off of and increased existing inequalities of wealth, gender and race. During a recent World Economic Forum session on “delivering social justice in the recovery”, Gabriela Bucher, Executive Director of Oxfam International, said: “Equality has to be at the heart of social justice. Many of us think of inequality as something just for idealists or an inconvenience to the serious business of capitalism, Oxfam’s message is that equality is a fresh, moral and serious framework that can reshape the way we run our economies for the 21st century.”³³

Oxfam’s inequality report shows that ending extreme inequality and abolishing gender and racial injustice must be at the very core of economic strategies. It identifies five steps to a better world:

- Governmental targets to reduce inequality and a focus beyond gross domestic product (GDP)
- Investing in universal public services (e.g. healthcare and education), an immediate priority being the delivery of a “people’s vaccine” to tackle the pandemic
- Income security, living wages, maximum wages and greater employment benefits.
- Progressive taxation
- Climate safety, building a green economy and preventing climate breakdown³⁴



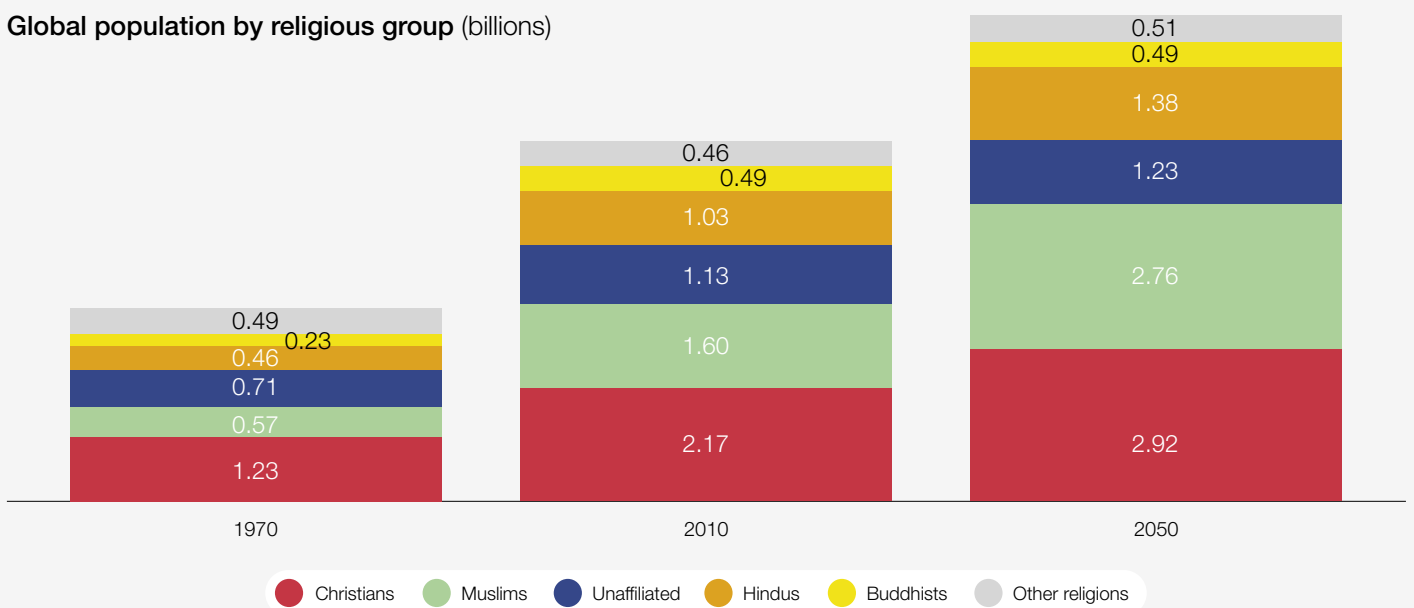
Religion

According to participants, religion and its influence should not be underestimated. Participants spoke of spiritual processes and how they can create a sense of inclusion. Many participants across the dialogues suggested that festivals and celebrations help to bring this sense of togetherness and should be encouraged.

Religion gives people the opportunity to share common values, create a sense of unity and encourage a sense of community: “Many faith communities encourage altruistic values, such as compassion and kindness, for the greater good of humanity. Common goals and adherence to altruistic values help them collaborate with one another in constructing a healthy social environment.”³⁵ With all of these influences combined, the faith factor plays a significant role in social cohesion and political stability.³⁶

FIGURE 5 Eighty years of religious change – 1970, 2010 and 2050

Global population by religious group (billions)



Note: “Other religions” include religious traditions not covered elsewhere in *Changing religion, changing economies*, (2015) Religious Freedom & Business Foundation, that do not have sufficient data to have their own category across all country censuses and surveys. Jews numbered about 13 million in 1970, 14 million in 2010 and are expected to be about 16 million in 2050.

Source: World Religion Database (1970) and Pew Research Center’s Future of World Religions (2010 and 2050)

Adapted from: World Economic Forum, *The Role of Faith in Systemic Global Challenges*, 2016, p. 5.

2.2 Trust and transparency

Working towards a just and equitable recovery after the COVID-19 crisis – one that not only looks to build back better institutions, but also to break down and reimagine pre-existing systemic inequalities – will require multistakeholder and participatory approaches. At the centre of these approaches is trust. Trust allows governments to enact policies on behalf of its citizens, companies to operate within communities, and citizens to share their lived experiences in a safe and meaningful way. Yet at a time when trust – in government, business and society at large – is essential for a consolidated and coordinated effort to build back better, it is eroding.

General distrust grew among many participants as the pandemic worsened. Fear of contracting the virus or an extended lockdown sowed doubts about whether their neighbours, family, friends or strangers were COVID-19-positive or not following the rules; however, the introduction of vaccines could resolve this, according to some participants. They also reported high cases of selfish behaviour such as hoarding supplies or not wearing a mask as contributing to a decline in their trust in society. As a participant from India noted: “you can’t have

much trust in society because people always find a way to break the rules”.

Trust in others was also strengthened during this time, as solidarity initiatives were put in place and a great deal of mutual aid was established – especially on a small scale, in villages. Younger people took care of the elderly and offered to go shopping for them; telephone calls were made to contact the most isolated people and identify their needs.

For French participants, trust was identified as a matter of collective responsibility. In India, some participants mentioned that the crisis had made them more hopeful about humanity. While some participants perceived an increased sense of trust, others noted that while trust may not have improved the value that we place on it increased greatly.

According to youth participants, most distress came from uncertainty and incongruence between different government policies in different countries. In this regard, according to the young participants, accurate information on COVID-19 and pandemics should be made available in schools.





We need more information about the virus to solve issues around trust.

Youth participant

Declining trust in others could have effects that go far beyond interpersonal connections and social cohesion within communities or countries. A recent Pew Research Centre study³⁷ found that people who trust others are more supportive of cooperation on international issues, and more approving of international organizations – they felt their country should take other countries’ interests into account in addressing major international concerns. Thus, a decreasing trust in others could lead to citizens pressuring governments to enact

more protectionist policies and engage less on global cooperation related to recovery efforts.

Participants also noted a significant decline in trust in government, fuelled by perceived inadequate responses to the COVID-19 crisis, unclear messaging about safety and recovery efforts, misinformation spread by politicians and governments and a perceived political capitalizing on the pandemic while citizens suffered.



Maintaining transparency in the efforts towards the alleviation of economic hardship occasioned by the pandemic should be a priority.

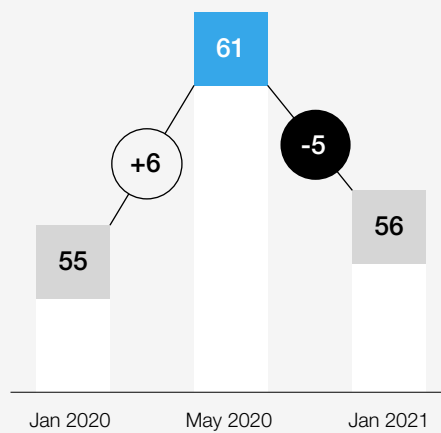
Participant in West Africa

This lack of trust in governments – as well as other institutions – is supported by the findings of the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer, which concluded that this trust, which grew at the beginning of the

pandemic when citizens turned to public leaders to respond to the pandemic, fell sharply over the second half of the year as many countries failed to get the virus under control.³⁸

FIGURE 6 Edelman trust barometer 2021

Government was the most trusted institution in May, then lost its lead 6 months later



+/- May 2020 to Jan 2021

Government	-8
Media	-6
NGOs	-6
Business	-3

Source: <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2021-trust-barometer>

3

Recommendations for communities, policy-makers and companies

In years to come, leaders should focus on improving public services, take decisions that prioritize environmental needs, build economic systems that are strong and resilient and further human rights.



Participants were asked to consider the following: If you were talking to leaders in your community, city or country, what decisions would you recommend be taken now that will make a positive difference to everyone's lives? What decisions should be taken that will mark the next 30 years and that will be positively remembered by those who will live on our planet in 2050?

1. On public services: Health, education and minimum social welfare were three priority areas identified by participants.

They believe that access to public services must be guaranteed, even in the smallest villages.



Education must be strengthened. Too many vulnerable people do not have opportunities for higher education, and this impacts their ability to access meaningful jobs. We need to enable all schools around the world to teach young people life skills, as, through this pandemic, it is evident we have been missing some of our human values. Students need to learn basic human values and how to treat each other correctly, as it is vital to have respect between everyone.

Youth participant

2. On the environment: Participants from different dialogues highlighted the climate emergency. The decisions taken in the coming years should strengthen the measures taken to protect the planet, particularly concerning the radical changes needed in energy sources to adopt a more sustainable approach. Participants in one of the Indian dialogues highlighted the interconnectedness

between humanity and the environment and how important it is to care for the environment through economically supportive ecological solutions, chemical-free natural farming and tree-based agriculture. Other recommendations pointed to the need for healthier living and building immunity to deal with such pandemics through yoga and traditional health systems.



I dream that all the political and economic decision-makers are moving in the same direction to manage global warming, which is a massive problem and is at the root of a lot of misery.

Participant in France

Similar topics were raised during the confkids dialogue organised with youth in France. According to them, the most important decisions that world leaders should make concern the environment, consumption patterns and the need for more equity among all human beings on the planet. The young people participating felt there should be more education on climate issues through school programmes to encourage and promote environmentally friendly behaviour, and to protect global public resources: for instance, water, ocean, air and forests.

They highlighted the need to halt overconsumption, avoid unnecessary purchases, consider the environmental impact of long-distance transportation

of goods, reduce waste, buy objects with longer lifespans, recycle or repurpose goods or make what you need yourself, and support small traders.

3. On the economy: According to French and global participants, there is a need to move away from the neoliberal capitalist paradigm, the world of overconsumption, “unbridled ultra-liberalism”, to “take into account the well-being of humanity rather than the GDP”, replacing it with a reasoned capitalism (keeping the spirit of free trade while taking into consideration its social and ecological impacts). West African participants called for a strong and resilient economic system, and the need to explore strategies that reduce the need to seek foreign aid.



Concentration of capital continues to happen during crisis – we need a fairer global taxation system with better redistribution of money.

Youth participant

4. On governance: Participants felt that more horizontal governance, governing by including the public, should be implemented. As part of this and to restore confidence in their institutions, in public action and in their governments, citizens (especially

young people) must be heard. Processes need to be implemented to take into account citizens' needs and visions. Participants also highlighted the need for more transparency in governance.



Implement a space for young citizens to make their voice heard and take part in public life.

Participant in India

5. On human rights: For West African participants, the most important decision to be made in the coming years would be to ensure respect for

human rights in all countries. Too many people are still deprived of certain freedoms, they said.



Refrain from making laws and regulations to close the social media space in our countries. This is not a wise decision and will kill innovation, livelihoods and civic freedoms.

Participant in West Africa

FIGURE 7 Top ten violations of civic freedoms

Top ten violations of civic freedoms



Source: Civicus Monitor <https://findings2020.monitor.civicus.org/>

4

The way forward: unlocking the potential of deliberative processes and multistakeholder cooperation

Deliberative processes can play a pivotal role in shaping responses fit for the future, leading to better decisions and governance outcomes.





I have a feeling of insecurity because I don't know what the world is going to be like later, I don't know what kind of world the adults are going to leave us. I want to take control of my future, what will become of our world, and this kind of dialogue is what will allow us to do that as children.

Youth participant

At a time when interconnected, long-mounting risks are materializing, the World Economic Forum's *Global Risks Report*, published in January 2021, reiterates that economic fragility and societal divisions are set to rise, with an increased risk of "social cohesion erosion".³⁹ Pressure is mounting for leaders to respond, and to change systems that have created today's increasingly unequal and fragmented world.

The *Global Risks Report for 2020* states: "Amid this darkening economic outlook, citizens' discontent has hardened with systems that have failed to promote advancement. Disapproval of how governments are addressing profound economic and social issues has sparked protests throughout the world, potentially weakening the ability of governments to take decisive action should a downturn occur. Without economic and social stability, countries could lack the financial resources, fiscal margin, political capital or social support needed to confront key global risks."⁴⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic has been described by many as an inflection point, with the challenges in front of us requiring immediate collective action. As this report has demonstrated, moving forward together is possible. It will require coordinated multistakeholder action, with citizen and community needs and perspectives at the centre, allowing mitigation for the worst-case scenarios and sustaining resilience as a global collective. Reimagined and adapted mechanisms for collaboration are imperative to make this a reality. They should reflect, prioritize and recognize the importance of:

1. **Co-determining and co-creating solutions for the present and future.** Deliberative processes can play a pivotal role in shaping responses fit for the future. Not just listening to, but actively including, citizens, communities and civil society can help unearth early-warning signs and help us understand where as societies we are vulnerable, and how best to respond to that vulnerability. Additionally, unlocking the public imagination – giving agency and voice to and supporting a larger number of individuals in society – will lead to better decisions and governance outcomes, and

help counteract polarization and social unrest. Based on that evidence, governments and institutions are increasingly turning to the public for help in decision-making. The Conference on the Future of Europe, for example, will kick off the European Union's largest deliberative democracy process.⁴¹

2. **Making social cohesion a priority.** New Zealand has been praised for the way it has managed the pandemic and was recently ranked as the country with the best COVID-19 response, in part due to its focus on social cohesion in its response.⁴² During the acute phase of the pandemic in April 2020, levels of social cohesion in the country were high: 87% of citizens approved of the way the government was responding to the pandemic, compared to an average of 50% for those in G7 countries who were asked the same question.⁴³ As tensions between economic and social interests persist, it will be particularly important to focus on transparent and responsive leadership, encouraging trust and belonging, and recognizing and responding to individual experiences and needs – all necessary ingredients for a cohesive society. The World Economic Forum has initiated a Global Future Council on Systemic Inequalities and Social Cohesion that will focus on the emerging examples of stakeholder investments in social capital needed to address systemic inequalities and explore the roles and collaborative efforts required from all stakeholders to strengthen social cohesion and social justice during and beyond the pandemic.⁴⁴
3. **Centring multistakeholder partnerships on community needs.** A report by Philanthropy U, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and GSVlabs highlights the imperative to work collaboratively and creatively, with new models of impact, in order to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. In a multistakeholder context, partnerships must be "driven by a collaboration between the people most affected and those most accountable for progress".⁴⁵ This will set us on a course to act quickly and with purpose within an unsettled global landscape.

5

Partner reflections: unlocking the public imagination

The time is ripe to enhance deliberative processes, as we work together toward our shared vision of a more equitable and inclusive future for all.



Peter Laugharn
President and Chief
Executive Officer,
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

We need to reimagine partnerships as we work together toward our shared vision of a more equitable and inclusive future for all. This is particularly relevant today, as no one sector can overcome the twin economic and global health crises of COVID-19, nor the underlying inequalities it laid bare. We need to leverage the unique strengths of each sector: philanthropy as facilitator, the private sector as accelerator, government as builder and civil society as expert.

There is an urgent need to listen to people in the communities most impacted, and we must place them at the centre of policy and programming decisions if we hope to address systemic inequalities and build a more sustainable future for all. With that in mind, philanthropy must seize this opportunity to work collaboratively and drive resources to local organizations. This is part of a

larger shift we need to make so that the voices from the community are not only valued appropriately but are directing us toward the solutions for their own communities. We do this by consulting and including community members early in the partnership process to define the problem and develop strategies and accountability mechanisms. The Citizen Dialogues represent one effective approach to this.

In rethinking “business as usual”, we need an inclusion revolution to ensure programmes, funding and policy serve the actual needs of communities, rather than their perceived needs. When we establish meaningful partnerships and collaborate with people in impacted communities, we will build a more just and equitable pandemic recovery for communities around the world.



Yves Mathieu
Co-Director, Missions
Publiques

As the world starts to look beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, this pivotal moment in time sheds light on the importance of inclusion, solidarity and equality. The global demand for inclusion of all categories of the population in the public sphere is steadily growing and the COVID-19 crisis has strengthened this trend. The pandemic has increased social inequalities, hindered access to healthcare, downgraded public services and degraded our social and cultural environment.

It is time to invent a new paradigm, one where citizens are no longer considered to be mere users and customers, and where human-centric approaches are preferred to customer-centric approaches. Such a shift in governance has never been more vital, and the public and private sectors

need to give consideration to people and to what they say. It is time to put aside old methods, where citizens were considered as markets, and instead, consider inviting them as co-decision-makers.

These dialogues, launched by the World Economic Forum, Missions Publiques, Isha Foundation, Civis, United World Colleges (UWC), West Africa Civil Society Institute and Confkids, though a first experiment, are a long-term solution to this challenge. The time is ripe for challenging decision-makers and enhancing practices of deliberative democracy – not via opinion polls and surveys but by generating a collective position through argumentation, dialogue and by sharing different opinions.



Omolara Balogun
Head, Policy Influencing and
Advocacy Unit, West Africa
Civil Society Institute (WACSI)

The dialogue was a great opportunity for WACSI to lead on a critical global conversation about the impact of COVID-19 on people and communities in West Africa specifically. It was a unique dialogue that brought in diverse groups as well as unusual voices to share their specific challenges, prevailing coping mechanisms and hopes for the future. The agenda of the dialogue, and collaboration with the World Economic Forum, not only aligned with WACSI's strategic interest, it also offered us

a unique platform to showcase our expertise in engendering critical and transformative dialogues across all strata and sectors of society. Aside from convening, facilitating and contributing to this important global reflection and ideation process for a desirous post-pandemic world, it was indeed a cherished and invaluable collaboration with the World Economic Forum, one that has amplified our visibility in the international arena.



Antaraa Vasudev
Founder, Civis

Participating in such a dialogue gave us an opportunity to connect with members of our community across the country. Hearing about the challenges and opportunities experienced in difficult times underscored our resilience and hope for our shared future. With education and trust in governments emerging as important areas of focus for India, a sense of "what next?" prevailed. Participants appeared to be searching for meaningful ways to collaborate and help shape the future.

Interestingly, the need for a deeper sense of community arose from the dialogue. This is despite India being a largely collectivist society. Participants spoke of a growth in collective action, and a need to align economic and ecological aspects for a sustainable future. Civis enables participatory dialogue on draft laws and policies – participating in the dialogue highlighted to our community the new opportunities for collective action that could be taken forward on a global scale as well.



Swami Lavana
Volunteer,
Isha Foundation

It was a wonderful experience for all our volunteers who were involved in facilitating the Citizen Dialogue in one of the remote regions in India! It was encouraging to see participants from different walks of life, sincerely participate and contribute their views to the discussions that happened. It was particularly interesting to note that people were willing to leave behind the hardships and inconveniences they faced by the pandemic and wanted to be part of the solution!

the population density in India. At the same time, this dialogue has provided deeper insights from a common man's perspective, that can significantly enhance our preparedness to handle such a crisis – or even avoid one, in the future.

Being a spiritual organization dedicated to raising the human consciousness, we at Isha Foundation strongly believe that humanity is today capable of addressing every single problem on the planet – if only we bring in "inclusiveness" into our businesses, leadership and education systems.

The participants' responses echoed in more ways than one that the frontline workers such as the healthcare community and the police personnel have done their very best to handle the pandemic, given

Creating a "Conscious Planet" is the way forward!



Déborah Le Bloas
Founder, Confkids

Today, young people have access to the same information as adults. They hear as much about the challenges of the future and the urgency of change as we do. Tomorrow, they will live by the solutions designed to address today's challenges. Yet young people are very rarely asked for their opinions in deciding what kind of world they would like to live in or what directions they would like decision-makers to take. We can only notice how adamantly they express their thoughts, hence offering potential solutions.

It seemed to us essential to participate in these dialogues to make their voices and proposals, their expectations and hopes heard. Their words are simple and straightforward. They bring us back to what is at stake: to make life on earth a top priority, and to keep this state of mind as a guiding compass for all our actions.

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